

# THE ACTIVIST



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May 2025

## Message from the Gen Sec

Welcome to the May edition of The Activist.

We are seeing some disturbing trends of serious incidents in both the Ports and Rail.

A message worth sharing from our Network members when discussing these incidents – “We need to slow down, focus on the task at hand and look after each other” and “we need to not assume but to make sure correct procedures are followed.”

Effective communication is essential as well.

Stay safe out there, productivity must never be rated above safety!

Todd Valster  
RMTU General Secretary



## Elections for RMTU National Management Committee

More than one nomination was received for the positions of;

### Auckland Rail Rep –

- Leighton Mosese nominated by Mike McLaughlan and Michael Williams.
- Jordan Mana – nominated by Leilani Torine and Sebastian Orr.

### North Island Rail Rep –

- Josh Goodwin – nominated by Simon McShane and Andrew Neville.
- Logan Rusling nominated by Reid Calvert and Gavin White.
- Shane McNae nominated by Justin Johnson and Lance Crawford
- Matt Bennie nomination by William Laison and Semi Vuatalevu

## Kiwirail wage Round 2025

KiwiRail are proposing a “*dates and rates*” approach to renewing the KR/RMTU MECA, rather than a full-blown remit/claims process both ways.

“Dates” means the term of the MECA and “rates” are the general increases. All of the Industrial Council Reps (our RMTU Bargaining Team) and many Branches have been briefed on the reasons behind this approach. Bargaining will commence in May 21 & 22 in Wellington.

Electronic ballots went out on Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> May.

These e-votes were sent to the email addresses we have in the union database. If we don't have an email address, then the e-vote is sent to the mobile numbers and if we have neither an email address nor a mobile number then we issued hard copy ballots by mail.

These ballots close Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> May at 1700hr



### **Lyttelton Port (LPC) proposing to cut 35 jobs**

The Press reported on 2 May, (LPC) must halt its consultation over a restructure of its container terminal operations after the Employment Relations Authority (ERA) ruled it breached collective employment agreements and its duty of good faith. The ERA found LPC acted unlawfully by excluding the Maritime Union of New Zealand (MUNZ) and the Rail and Maritime Transport Union (RMTU) from the early development of a proposal to disestablish 35 roles. Instead, the port went straight to affected workers with a fully formed proposal. In a determination released on the 29<sup>th</sup> April, the ERA ordered LPC to stop direct consultation and engage in structured discussions with the two unions over the proposal, with a 20-working-day deadline for that process to be completed.

### **Blocking irregularities-critical safety risk for staff on track.**

RMTU track staff reps have told Kiwirail they are deeply concerned about recent incidents where track staff have had their track protection removed in error, leaving them unprotected on track for up to 40 minutes. The most recent incident on 2 May was the second in as many weeks

**More serious incidents in ports and rail.** Further to the incidents reported in last months Activist, on 28<sup>th</sup> of April a C3 Port worker suffered a very close call when his vehicle was hit and crushed by a log loader. The only part of the vehicle not crushed was the area the driver was sitting in. Maritime NZ is investigating the incident. On the 6<sup>th</sup> April a KiwiRail HiRail vehicle and train collided outside the Kaimai Tunnel. Fortunately there were no injuries. Waka Kotahi /NZTA and TAIC are investigating the incident.



You can update you contact details by [clicking here](#)

**Minister of Workplace Relations and Safety – Brook Van Veldon uses ‘war on road cones’ to distract from serious changes to health and safety law.**

The Coalitions Government’s Minister Brook Van Veldon has announced the first tranche of changes to the Health and Safety at Work Act. The changes include reducing the scope of the current legislation so Boards of Directors will no longer have legal duties relating to health and safety. The Minister says the plan is to “get rid of over compliance” and plans to carve-out for small, low-risk businesses from general Health and Safety requirements. The detail of what is considered ‘low risk or small business’ will be revealed at the end of this year as well as the rest of the changes.

Regarding Road Cones, the Minister thinks excessive road cones are a major health and safety problem and has set up a phone hot line for people to report excessive use of road cones. Worksafe NZ has been tasked with receiving the hot line calls from people wanting to vent about traffic management issues. It is not clear whether Worksafe is being tasked with investigating these issues. This must feel like added insult to injury after having their funding cut and resources already stretched. The Minister’s focus on road cones and “compliance costs” is a lost opportunity to genuinely improve the legislation and lift standards so NZ is a safer place to work.

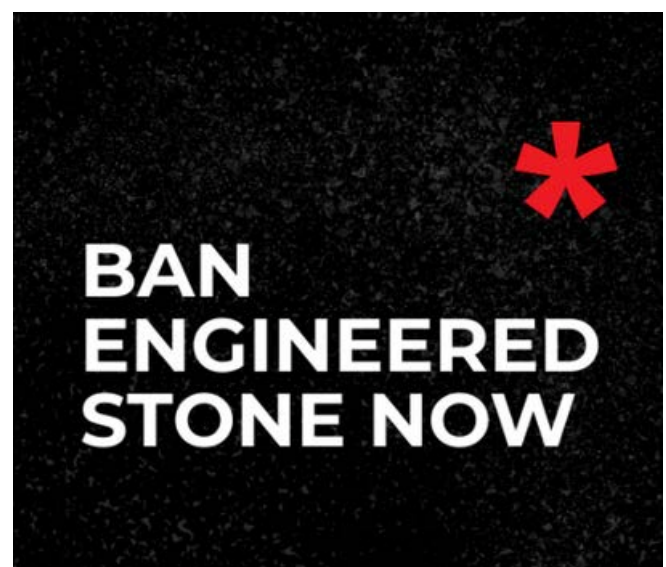


**The NZ Council of Trade Unions has launched a campaign to ban engineered stone used in benchtops due to accelerated silicosis risk.**

The New Zealand Council of Trade Unions Te Kauae Kaimahi has launched a campaign to ban the import, supply, and use of engineered stone in Aotearoa New Zealand. Described by CTU President Richard Wagstaffe as “the asbestos of our times”, the dust from cutting or grinding the stone used for kitchen and bathroom benches causes accelerated silicosis which is a severe progressive lung disease. The disease caused by exposure to the dust is a more aggressive form of silicosis that appears sooner and may progress faster than chronic silicosis. Wagstaffe says “Brooke van Velden has the power to save workers’ lives. All she needs to do is follow Australia’s example and implement a total ban.”

There is broad support for this campaign. Last year the CTU joined with 18 other organisations, including public health experts and health and safety specialists, and called on the Minister to act.

To sign the petition click the link [here](#).





### **Coming up: RMTU Ports Forum and Womens' forum.**

The union is looking forward to hosting 80 Delegates for the RMTU Women's Forum on **29<sup>th</sup> July** and the National Port Delegates meeting on the **30th and 31st July 2025**.

The location for both forums is in Wellington at the James Cook Grand Chancellor Hotel. The Union has received nominations from most of the branches and is working on arrangements.

### **Interislander**

It was great to have the recent announcement from the government for rail enabled ferries, however the hard work has only just begun. The problems that plagued iRex are still there, it is relatively easy to build ferries in comparison to the challenges of building the landside infrastructure. We watch closely to see how this project advances.

In the meantime, ILL have begun a work force modelling project, the purpose of which is to collect data on the work done in the terminals. This will no doubt leave some of our members nervous as to possible future restructures. It is unknown where this project leads and it is the opinion of the RMTU that the operations are run fairly lean. The problem will always be that they are flat out when a ship is tied up and it is a lot quieter when one is not.

### **Taranaki**

Work continues at Port Taranaki as the RMTU works with the employer to work through the details of the implementation of their recent restructure.

Key changes have been brought about due to the reduction in gas production in Taranaki which has flowed on into methanol production which made up a major part of cargo handled in our only West Coast Port. The members here have been proactive in participating in consultation around restructure, this has resulted in no forced redundancies, although some did choose to move on as the proposed changes did not suit everyone. The major changes happening in Security & Comms and the Tanker Terminal.

The hard times in Taranaki continue with yet another restructure proposal in Taranaki with Qube. This employer has proposed to cut jobs in the stevedoring area again. Unfortunately, this seems to be a trend as stevedoring is once again becoming casualised. Casualisation of these work forces does not help with things like Health and Safety reporting and fatigue risk management as casuals will prioritise having the phone ringing over potentially rocking the boat.

**You can update your contact details by scanning the QR code below**



## Transport Accident Investigation Commission (TAIC) Investigations

**Here are a list of current Rail Inquiries opened recently by TAIC.**

Collision, freight train and HRV, Kaimai Tunnel portal on 6 April 2025-RO-2025-105

Signal outage, Wellington Station, 27 March 2025- RO-2025-104

Shunt train, SPAD, North Island Main Trunk, near Westfield, Auckland, 1 February 2025-RO-2025-103,

The Port Chalmers freight container yard. Safe working incident, Port Chalmers marshalling yard, 23 January 2025-RO-2025-102

## Incident investigation: Right to representation/Right to silence

The RMTU reminds members of their natural justice right to union representation when being interviewed about an incident, even a 'fact finding meeting'. If you are interviewed by WorkSafe NZ, Waka Kotahi or Maritime NZ you have the right to silence. This is especially important if you're "interviewed under caution". It's important members reach out to their Delegate or Organiser for advice.

## Auckland One Rail (AOR) bargaining wrapped!

RMTU meet with AOR over the month of February and March for bargaining, we achieved great results, the company offered 5% upfront for 2 years with \$1,000 payment for all members of the Union as of 1 April 2025.

We used Vero voting for the first time for this bargaining and achieved a great result, over 68% of Union members voted over the Easter Block of Line. Amazing participation rate from our AOR members!

Over 77% return vote was to vote to accept the agreement.

Well done to our bargaining team at AOR.

## TAIC Report RO-2023-106 TranzAlpine, train parting, Arthur's Pass

TAIC has released their report on the Tranz Alpine train parting incident at Arthur's Pass on 17 December 2023. The report said the incident happened due to a single component of the carriage-coupler system braking, causing the two carriages to part. The broken component had a pre-existing fracture that had not been identified in regular maintenance inspections by KiwiRail. TAIC said it is virtually certain that the train's configuration of four locomotives operating in throttle position three while applying the train's brakes to their full capability caused the weakened coupler component to break. They said, adequate inspection and maintenance plans for safety-critical components are vital to ensure components remain in a condition fit for their intended purpose.

Preprepared and practised response plans assist in an incident to ensure appropriate action can be undertaken safely.



## **Mechanical Consultative Council (MCC) Roadshow**

The RMTU recently took to the road with Rolling Stock Operations Manager Campbell Loudon to talk about future plans for Rolling Stock Operations throughout the North Island. It was interesting to see the responses of mechanical engineers throughout the country and to be honest there was a degree of scepticism. The good news delivered to all was that sweeping changes including closing depots and cutting jobs has been revised and the cuts in the short term are not so extreme, however the news is not so good for Kawerau which has a proposal to cut the head count from six to two. This is currently under consultation, and this has been shared with the RMTU.

The biggest change is turning Westfield into a major mechanical hub doing the majority of heavy maintenance checks for the DL's and wagons. This has started with a working group being established to see how this works. There will need to be effort put into upgrading the facility as the building currently has a leaky roof and the toilets flood. There needs to be work done to ensure that Westfield has all the necessary resources to deal with the workload.

What is not entirely clear is what the work in the regional depots looks like, given that they will be dealing only with local running repairs, and with the likes of Bay of Plenty, dealing with a captured fleet. Wellington will still be looking after Locos and rolling stock for Wairarapa. Concerns were raised at Palmerston North around plans for that depot to concentrate on EF locomotives and to work on their reliability;

the concerns are around the required expertise to work in complex electrical systems where they are not trained as electrical engineers.

Hutt shops will have its workload increased with one DL a month getting a major overhaul to address issues such as corrosion and electrical problems. This brings about 100 hours a month to the workshops and is focused on increasing the reliability of the DL locomotive, which does not like getting wet by all accounts. These locomotives are being asked to last through until 2050.

There is to be focus on servicing, there is another working group dealing with this as KR is still of the opinion that we over maintain and that if we touch our assets less they will be more reliable, the jury is out on that one. However provisioning is still on the cards, this will not be undertaken by operations but will be done in servicing. The proposal sees locomotives only having a full service once every 7 days and just being provisioned on the other days. This will rely on the locos being scheduled to be in any one of three locations, Auckland, Palmerston North or Wellington. The other locations in the North Island will only provision, it becomes unclear what the servicing personnel will do in locations such as Te Rapa and Mount Maunganui.

Te Rapa stays in play for now mainly due to KR being contractually bound to commissioning new assets and doing such work as installing ETCS for locos operating in Auckland metro areas but their future is uncertain beyond 2030.

### **MCC Roadshow continued**

This is radically different to what these depots were told late last year, which is good. There are still plenty of hurdles for this workforce to jump over for the next few years as KR struggles to make ends meet. While for the most part our members were happy to see these changes, they did feel that they had been put under undue duress from last year's presentation and it is plain we are not out of the woods yet.

### **Hawkes Bay Port**

Negotiations continue for a new collective agreement at Napier Port. This has been a protracted negotiation resulting in many days around the table with what seemed like no end in sight. A report back meeting was held on May 1st to update the members on where we are at with this tricky negotiation. The hold ups have been squarely with the company and the members are becoming increasingly restless the RMTU hopes to resolve this situation soon.

### **Hawkes Bay Rail**

Following a harsh restructure last year following the closure of WPI mill closure in the mid North Island it appears that cuts have gone too close to the bone. Without the ability to cover leave in the yard trains are not arriving on time to the Napier Port. Given the focus that Kiwirail is putting on on-time performance it beggars' belief that they would cut back in a way that affects OTP.

The RMTU believes that KR should honour its own restructure document that stated if there was to be two trains a day on the Hawkes Bay line that there would be another FTE in the yard in Napier.

### **Palmerston North**

Continuing low freight volumes in the lower North Island plague this central freight depot. Our roster delegates continue to try to improve LE life balance by advocating for rosters that are workable. Another depot that underwent restructure late last year.

### **Marlborough Port**

Port Marlborough and the RMTU are shortly to commence renewal of the CEA, a well-attended claims meeting on the second of April put forward a modest number of claims. With the employer signalling a desire to wrap up talks quickly we look forward to a good wage round.

### **Nelson**

Port Nelson members recently ratified their collective agreement via an electronic vote. This was successful with more members being balloted than we have in the past (66%), with an 82% yes vote it was pleasing to see that our members felt the freedom to vote with conviction and not having to worry about what others thought. A very successful toe in the water for electronic voting.

